WAY TO GOD-REALIZATION

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Publisher's Note.

The present brochure is an English translation of the *Sādhana Patha* in Hindi which has become popular among the Hindi-reading public as a helpful and practical guide to seekers after true happiness The Hindi edition of the booklet is now completing its third edition of 5000 copies, and a fourth edition is going to be out very soon The first two editions comprising together 10,000 copies were exhausted soon after their appearance. It is hoped the present English edition will be equally popular among those of the English-reading public who possess faith in God and are anxious for God-realization

Contents.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIGHEST GOAL OF HUMAN EXISTENCE.

हरिरेव पर ब्रह्म हरिरेव परा गति ।
हरिरेव परा मुक्तिर्हरिर्गेय सनातन. ॥

—*Sri Vyasadeva*

HARI (Lord Visnu) is the Supreme Reality, Hari is the highest goal, Hari is final beatitude, Hari is the eternal principle Sing His praises"

He who endeavours to realize God even in the midst of the manifold difficulties and obstacles by which he is surrounded in this world is, indeed, a fortunate soul. Most people in this world do not even believe in the existence of God. Out of those who recognize His existence a large majority do not aspire to attain Him, their intellect being clouded by the thick veil of ignorance, which is the chief characteristic of the *Tamas* element. Even those few who have acquired some idea of the value of God-Realization through listening to sacred discourses and study of scriptural texts, covet base worldly enjoyments in return for remembering Him and addressing prayers to Him, their intellect being clouded by manifold desires and ambitions. There are some, more advanced than the latter, who start spiritual practices under the influence of Sattvic impulses of their mind, but they do not pursue it with perseverance and zeal and, having not yet been able to make

up their mind as to the goal they have to attain to in life, and having no knowledge of the obstacles that present themselves in the way and how to overcome them, they give up the practice and go astray The Lord has rightly observed in the *Bhagavadgītā* —

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।
यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन् मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥

(VII 3)

"Among thousands of men scarce one strives for perfection, of the successful strivers scarce one knows Me in essence"

Notwithstanding all this, the human soul has a natural craving for God, for everyone longs for happiness—for perfect happiness, unalloyed happiness, everlasting happiness No one in this world hankers for happiness that is limited, happiness which is mixed with unhappiness, or happiness which is shortlived Of course, very often we seek gratification from a particular

pleasure which is limited in character, taking it for the time being to be perfect. Not long afterwards we begin to feel that there is something wanting in that pleasure and seek to make good the deficiency. This proves that pleasures which have something wanting in them cannot satisfy us for all time to come. We are always in quest of perfect happiness. And perfect happiness, happiness which does not lack anything, is the very nature of God, who is omnipresent, eternal and beyond the conception of time. Thus the various Jīvas (individual souls) are continually approaching God, the home of everlasting bliss, through various paths and with their faces turned in different directions, like so many rivers flowing in different directions and through various channels, ultimately to merge themselves in the ocean. This eternal craving of the human soul for happiness testifies to its longing for union with God. So long as it does not reach its destination, this Godward march will never cease.

But, shrouded as it is by the veil of ignorance, the human soul is unable to comprehend the true nature of happiness That is why it encounters manifold obstacles in the way It sometimes misses the right track, sometimes halts in the journey, sometimes proceeds in the opposite direction, sometimes loses heart and gives up further progress, and sometimes it stops in a wayside inn as if it had reached the destination, or, in other words, it is engrossed in trivial pleasures, mistaking them for perfect happiness That is why such souls are called low (पामर) or sensual (विषयी) On the other hand, those who have knowledge of their destination and are constantly striving with great assiduity and to the best of their ability to attain it, are designated as practicants (साधक) or aspirants to liberation (मुमुक्षु) Thus, in order to enter the path of spiritual discipline, the first thing one has got to do is to fix one's goal, to determine one's ideal

What is the Highest Goal ?

One should first of all fix one's goal, the destination of one's journey So long as one does not make up one's mind as to where one has to go, it is no use talking about the route or the expenses of the journey Similarly, so long as one does not fix the goal of one's life, the object that one has to attain, it is useless to endeavour to know what path one should follow, and what particular mental discipline he should undergo In the present age most people are drifting aimlessly, being carried away by the sweeping tide of *Prakrti* They little know who they are, why they have been endowed with a human body and what is the mission of their life To earn money by fair means or foul, to maintain the family therewith and thus end the career of earthly existence, that is the life-work of the average householder

It has been stated above, and the experience of every individual corro-

borates it, that every one of us is in quest of happiness. Now let us consider whether the objects we are busy collecting and preserving are a source of real happiness to us It is known to all that everything in the world is transitory and perishable That which is perishable is transient, and that which is transient is bound to disappear one day That which affords pleasure to us at the time of its acquisition or enjoyment is bound to cause pain when it disappears Hence everything in this world is painful because it is perishable Great festivities are held over the birth of a son and we are transported with joy to see an infant sporting in our house, but a day surely comes when either the child leaves us, or we have to depart under compulsion leaving the child behind Almost all of us have had an experience of the pain felt at the loss of an object which one has held dear to one's heart and claimed as one's own Hence our grief at the loss of

our son is as intense, if not more, as the joy we felt at the time of his birth or on seeing him frisking about in the courtyard The same is true of one's wife, parents, teacher, pupil, honour, fame, nay, of the very life as well as the pleasures of the next world In short, a transitory object can never give us absolute and perfect happiness No one contends the fact that all worldly enjoyments are painful in the end Nay, the pleasure that one derives from the transitory objects of the world will on careful consideration appear as mixed with pain even at the time of its enjoyment

All the enjoyments of this world as well as of the next are transitory The reality lying hidden behind these ephemeral objects and forms, their basis as it were, is the only eternal substance which is always uniform and indestructible The *Gītā* tells us of the same in the following verse—

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥
(II 20)

"He is not born, nor does he die, nor, having been, ceases he any more to be Unborn, perpetual, eternal and ancient, he is not slain when the body is slain."

That supreme substance is none else than God, and to merge one's individuality, which is only assumed, entirely in His oneness so that He alone may remain, is God-Realization and that is the highest goal of our existence. This goal is determined by the constant practice of distinction between eternal and non-eternal substances, and the first thing we require, to maintain our progress towards this goal is dispassion, *Vairāgya*.

CHAPTER II

DISPASSION

Dispassion (*Vairāgya*) means the extinction of desire for all objects, whether seen or unseen, heard or unheard of, pertaining to this world or to the next So long as worldly objects continue to attract us we cannot steadily fix our mind on our final goal, viz, God-Realization Dispassion is the only

antidote against our fondness for worldly objects Our attachment to worldly objects is mainly due to the following four causes —

(1) Consciousness of their reality,

(2) Consciousness of their attractiveness,

(3) Consciousness of their agreeableness, and

(4) Consciousness of their loving nature

Dispassion is acquired by negating this fourfold consciousness through wisdom or discrimination (विवेक) Hence discrimination between what is eternal and what is non-eternal (नित्यानित्यविवेक) is the first necessity Discrimination arouses dispassion and the latter in its turn stabilizes and purifies discrimination Thus the two are more or less interdependent Of the four causes mentioned above the first is the most tenacious and disappears last of all, it forms the very root of the other three If the very

existence of the world is effaced from your mind, there can be no question of its appearing attractive, agreeable or full of love any longer But this is something very difficult to accomplish Hence an aspirant is required first of all to overcome the last three and then to eradicate the first

Negation of Attractiveness.

Consciousness of their attractiveness is primarily responsible for our attachment to worldly objects The world appears attractive to us simply because of the perversity of our intellect (बुद्धिविपर्यय). This perversity is traceable to *Avidyā* or nescience, which is a child of ignorance (अज्ञान) It is this *Avidyā* which makes the unsightly appear to us as beautiful, the evanescent as permanent, pain as pleasure, the impure as pure, the unreal as real and that which is devoid of love as loving It is *Avidyā* which makes everything appear just the contrary, much in the same way as day appears as night and night as day to an

owl It is due to *Avidyā* that we look upon this frail human body—which is nothing but a bundle of flesh and bone—and things pertaining to it, which are hardly of any worth, as beautiful and pleasing to the eye A man begins to entertain partiality for that which constantly occupies his mind And this partiality in course of time develops into a sense of attractiveness which continues to draw his mind towards that object Now let us consider whether worldly objects are really attractive, or only appear to be so and, in the latter case, what makes them look so attractive

Careful thought would reveal that worldly objects have got no charm in reality For instance, what is there in a human body which appears to us so attractive? Of what is it composed? What particular thing is attractive and charming in this rickety frame consisting of bone, flesh, blood, marrow, fat, phlegm, faeces, urine and similar other

substances, each of which will produce a nauseating sensation if looked at separately The same thing is true of other objects In fact, attractiveness does not inhere in a particular object, it exists only in our conception of it It is our conception of beauty which gets crystallized into a convention or standard and makes a thing appear beautiful to us

Dark complexion attracts a negro as much as fair complexion attracts us In China till recently, tiny feet were regarded as an attractive feature in the fair sex Girls were provided with iron shoes from their very infancy, which stunted the growth of their feet Although this proved a source of great inconvenience to them while walking, they cheerfully put up with it in order to look beautiful Ladies belonging to the Marwari community of Rajputana load themselves with unwieldly and uncouth ornaments and other heavy articles of wear merely

to have the satisfaction of looking beautiful, whereas Gujerati ladies, who are content with a plain and simple attire, laugh at them. Marwari ladies, on their part look upon the dress of Gujerati ladies with the same sort of feeling This proves that beauty lies in our conception of it rather than in the object which we call beautiful It is we who have invested certain objects with a charm by conceiving them as beautiful according to our respective tastes and standards

Negation of Agreeableness in Objects of Enjoyment

Even granting that worldly objects have no charm, it cannot be gainsaid, one may argue, that they are enjoyable No, our contention is that worldly objects are not even enjoyable Electricity does not exist in the bulb which is fixed to the wall of a room It comes direct from the Power-house, where it is generated and stored Even so enjoyment comes from the Self, which

is the ultimate source of bliss, nay, which is bliss itself If the object itself were a source of enjoyment, it should have afforded pleasure even after it has been fully enjoyed This is, however, not the case A hungry person would relish even a piece of stale bread If he gets delicious food he would heartily enjoy it till he is satiated He would, however, feel annoyed if he is pressed to partake of it even after satiation The same articles which he greatly relished only a few moments ago will appear an eyesore to him This shows that pleasure does not exist in delicious food The fact is that he was feeling hungry and was yearning for something to eat Once he got it, his mind was at rest for some time—till he felt another want The blissful nature of the self, the *Ātmā,* was reflected on the mirror-like mind, which had thus been steadied, and the mind felt gratified as it were We mistook this pleasure as coming from the object, the food

There is one thing more to be considered in this connection Supposing the objects which we seem to enjoy are blissful by nature or really enjoyable, there is no reason why one and the same object should affect different individuals differently according to their temperament or disposition, and according to their attitude towards that object For instance, the ruler of a particular kingdom conquers and annexes the territory of an enemy state This incident is delightful to his friends and unpleasant to his opponents Even though the incident is one, the degree of pleasure or pain derived therefrom varies Such is the nature of the pleasure derived from worldly objects. This shows that we have erroneously conceived worldly objects to be the source of pleasure As a matter of fact, they are as deceptive as a mirage in a desert Thoughts of this kind will help one to negate the sense of agreeableness in objects of enjoyment of the world Now as regards the loving nature of worldly objects

Negation of Love in Worldly objects.

Even granting that our children or friends possess no attractiveness and do not give us happiness, their love, one may argue, is quite evident, and, requires no proof On careful thought, however, even this would appear to be open to question It is self-interest (स्वार्थ) which masquerades as love in all these cases Guru Nanak said —

"I have seldom found earthly love sincere and true Our dear and near ones, including our wife and our most intimate friends, are all actuated by self-interest

"All desert us at the last moment that is the wonder of wonders

"This foolish self does not come to its senses even now, although I have exhausted all my powers of persuasion in expostulating with it every day

"He alone", says Nanak, "can cross the ocean of worldly existence who sings praises of the Lord"*

Suppose a fire breaks out in the house we live in and we are all buried in sleep, including our wife and children, having our ornaments, gold, promissory notes, clothes, and other valuables by our side We wake up to find ourselves surrounded by flames, we raise a hue and cry, try our best to rescue our wife and children, ornaments and clothes, money and gold without exposing ourselves to risk Presently the flames get furious and advance rapidly towards us, ready to devour us We cannot keep ourselves steadily any longer and run

* जगतमें झूठी दखी प्रीत।
अपने ही सुखसों सब लागे, क्या दारा क्या मीत॥
मेरो मेरो सभी कहत हैं हितसों बाद्यो चीत।
अंतकाल संगी नहि कोउ, यह अचरजकी रीत॥
मन मूरख अजहू नहि समुझत सिख दै हारयो नीत।
'नानक' भव-जल-पार परै, जो गावै प्रभुके गीत॥

for life, leaving everything at the mercy of the flames Our wife and children whom we held so dear are left inside and cannot be saved Emerging safe we raise a hue and cry to save them but do not venture inside Had we loved them truly, we would have gladly laid down our own life to save them This shows that we are not really bound by ties of love with them but our relation with them is one of self-interest only We treat them lovinglv only so long as our interests are not interfered with A Hindi poet has truly said —

जगतमें स्वारथके सब मीत ।
जब लगि जासों रहत स्वार्थ कछु, तब लगि तासों प्रीत ॥

"All our so-called friends have self-interest as the motive of their friendship

"They love us only so long as their interests are served through us."

The frail ties of artificial love are broken the moment one finds one's

interests crossed We bewail the loss of our dear and near ones as well as of our fortune only because our interests suffer thereby Here it may be asked whether those who suffer martyrdom in the cause of their motherland are actuated by true love for the land, or are guided by self-interest. True, their love has expanded itself they are really at a much higher level than those who are self-centred, who have confined their self within very narrow limits But it cannot be denied that their sacrifice has gratification of Self as its motive From this it should not be concluded that no one should practise self-sacrifice in a noble cause It should be borne in mind that but for some amount of dispassion even this type of self-sacrifice is not possible Had the patriot not turned back on petty interests connected with the body alone, the scope of his love could not have been so widened Nevertheless, such a sacrifice does not necessarily reveal true love for the family, community or country Happiness here or hereafter, fame and self-aggrandisement may be the principal motive under-

lying such an act of sacrifice As a matter of fact, even the patriot loves others for his own sake

We love even our own person for the sake of our happiness We get anxious to part even with this mortal frame when it begins to interfere with our happiness The fact that we wish to get rid of our body, or even attempt to commit suicide, when we suffer from a very painful disease, or are insulted and humiliated, shows that we have no love for our body Love is offered only to that which deserves it, and the only lovable ob ect is the Self Real love even for the world is possible only when we look upon it as our very self That is why the *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* says —

"The wife is dear to us not for the wife's sake, but for our own sake The sons are dear to us not for the sons' sake, but for our own sake, and so on "*

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* न वा अरे जायायै कामाय जाया प्रिया भवत्यात्मनस्तु कामाय जाया प्रिया भवति। न वा अरे पुत्राणा कामाय पुत्रा प्रिया भवन्त्यात्मनस्तु कामाय पुत्रा प्रिया भवन्ति, इत्यादि।

(II IV 5

It is to be understood that we ourselves stand in the same position in relation to others.

After negating the loving nature of worldly objects by trains of thought on the lines indicated above we should lastly proceed to negate their very existence

Negation of the Existence of Objects

Granting that worldly objects are devoid of attractiveness, happiness and love, no one can repudiate their existence If they do not exist, how do we perceive them, smell them, touch them, speak to them, hear their sound, and so on This may be answered by saying that when one mistakes a rope for a snake, does he not actually see a snake in the rope? Does he ever see it as a rope? Had it appeared to him as a rope, he had no cause to fear it or to recoil from it

This has been beautifully explained by Goswami Tulasidas in the following memorable lines —

"O Hari! so thick is the veil of my ignorance that in spite of my seeing things for myself, hearing and saying wise things and understanding them, my doubts and misgivings do not disappear

"If the world is unreal, what makes us experience the three kinds of pain? The water seen in a mirage cannot be called real, nevertheless, the optical illusion which makes the desert assume the appearance of a lake causes great affliction to the deer

"Suppose a man lying comfortably in a cosy bed dreams that he is drowning in the ocean, and is terrified He cannot be rescued even by millions of life-boats unless and until he wakes up from the dream

"This world is frightful indeed, and appears attractive only so long as one does not look deeply into it It is delightful to him alone who has attained mental equilibrium.

contentment, compassion and discrimination

"Although the Vedas declare the whole creation of Brahmā (the Creator) to be false, no one can overcome the fear of rebirth without devotion to the Lord of Raghus and association with holy men"*

Kabir also says —

"Delusion pervades all the three worlds, delusion is spread everywhere Kabir says in a loud voice that it **is**

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* हे हरि यह भ्रमकी अधिकाई।
देखत-सुनत कहत-समुझत संसय-संदेह न जाई॥
जो जग मृषा तापत्रय अनुभव होइ कहहु केहि लेखे।
कहि न जाइ मृग-बारि सत्य भ्रमतें दुख होइ बिसेषें॥ १॥
सुभग सेज सोवत सपनें बारिधि बूड़त भय लागै।
कोटिहुँ नाव न पार पाव सो, जब लगि आपु न जागै॥ २॥
अनबिचार रमनीय सदा संसार भयंकर भारी।
सम संतोष दया बिबेक तें ब्यवहारी सुखकारी॥ ३॥
तुलसिदास सब बिधिप्रपंच जग जदपि झूठ श्रुति गावै।
रघुपतिभगति संतसंगति बिनु को भवत्रास नसावै॥ ४॥

the village of delusion that we are living in "*

The existence of the world has to be negated by such thoughts But this is as difficult to accomplish as it is easy to talk of This is generally the outcome of long and diligent practice A lot of wisdom is required for it So long as this does not happen, one should continue to negate the attractiveness, agreeableness and loving nature of objects This constitutes what is known as *Vairāgya*

Spiritual Advance is not Possible without Vairagya.

Those who seek to attain the highest goal of human existence without dispassion, attempt to build a castle in the air Hence an aspirant should always keep the fire of *Vairāgya* burning within himself He should cogitate over

* भरम परा तिहुँ लोकमें, भरम बसा सब ठाव।
कहै कबीर पुकारिके, बसे भरमके गाँव॥

the fact that nothing in this world is permanent or lasting, that wealth and prosperity, knowledge and intellectual calibre, power and prestige, accomplishments and embellishments, physical strength and attractive features, youth and comeliness, everything is reduced to dust, as soon as man dies Through pride of wealth we slight our fellow-men, our own brethren We look down upon others on account of our high birth or learning We brook no rivals in leadership and amaze others by our brilliant speeches and writings We claim superiority even over eminent statesmen in diplomacy and political insight We assert our equality with Karna of the *Mahābhārata* (whose generosity and benevolence have become proverbial) in charity and expect to be called a second Bhīma in physical prowess We cannot brook a rival in fame and glory We are very proud of our body, mind and intellect, and never stop to think that all that we are proud of is ephemeral and

hollow and may be wiped out of existence any moment As soon as the body perishes, the whole show will come to an abrupt end

Kabir has made the following observations in regard to this body —

"The body will be reduced to ashes if cremated, and will be reduced to dust, if interred, it is as ephemeral as a jar made of unbaked clay and filled with water "*

He further says —

"This human body is like a bubble which bursts in no time and will disappear as stars in the morning "†

"You may bask in the sunshine of glory for a few days more Mind you, you will not be able to visit this town

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* जारे देह भस ह्वै जाइ, गाडे माटी खाई।
काचे कुंभ उदक ज्यों भरिया, तनकी यही बड़ाई॥

† पानी केरा बुदबुदा, अस मानुसकी जात।
देखत ही छिप जायगा, ज्यों तारा परभात॥

and this lane (which you are inhabiting now) over again.

"The stately mansions which presented a gala appearance and resounded with music for the livelong day are now lying desolate and have turned into a habitat for crows

"The bones (which we nourish with such meticulous care) burn like dried fuel and the beautiful tresses of hair (which we preserve so scrupulously) burn like straw Kabir was filled with dispassion to see the whole world on fire.

"Either to-day or to-morrow you will have to shift your residence to the dreary forest and your remains will be run over by the plough and overgrown with verdure which will serve as food for the cattle

"The world ignorantly calls the shadow of happiness as happiness and exults over it (They forget that) the whole universe is food for Death and that a part of it has already found its

way into his terrible and gaping jaws while the rest is still in his lap awaiting its turn to be consigned to the jaws

"Even those illustrious sages whose thundering voice rent asunder the mountains and who quaffed the ocean in one draught have been pounded to dust Who are we to brag and boast ?

"Seeing the gardener approaching, the buds exclaim, 'Lo ! the full-blown flowers have been culled ! To-morrow is our turn'

"Clay addresses the potter thus—

'Why do you take the trouble of kneeding me with your feet ? A day will come when the tables will be turned and you will be crushed under me'

"We shall all die one day and our very names will be forgotten We shall desert a populous village and inhabit a desolate wilderness instead

"Notwithstanding bragging warriors surrounding him on all sides, Death

snatched him away from the heart of the palace so formidable is Death"*

This is going to be the fate of our earthly existence Hence we would be well-advised to cease glorying over our short-lived brilliance and to withdraw our mind from the world

Let us also remember the following lines of Kabir in this connection —

"They wrap me in a winding-sheet while I am ready to depart When the vital airs are about to leave the body, the pupils of the eye turn backwards The body is then taken out from the interior of the house and the palaces and mansions are all left behind

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* कबीर नौबत आपनी, दिन दस लेहु बजाय।
यह पुर पट्टन यह गली, बहुरि न देखौ आय॥
माती नौबत बाजता, होत छतीसो राग।
सो मंदिर खाली पड़े, बैठन लागे काग॥
आज कालके बीचमें, जंगल होगा बास।
ऊपर ऊपर हल फिरैं, ढोर चरेंगे घास॥
हाड जलै ज्यों लाकड़ी, केस जलै ज्यों घास।
सब जग जलता देखकर, भए कबीर उदास॥

"Four pall-bearers then lift the bier and take it along the roads and streets crying aloud None of the belongings accompanies the body except the dry fuel."†

It is not possible to develop love for God without cultivating dispassion,

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झूठे सुखको सुख कहैं, मानत हैं मन मोद।
जगत चबेना कालका, कछु मुख महैं, कछु गोद॥
हाँकै परबत फाटते, समँदर घूँट भराय।
ते मुनिवर धरती गले, क्या कोइ गरब कराय॥
माली आवत देखिकै, कलियाँ करैं पुकार।
फूली फूली चुनि लई, कालि हमारी बार॥
माटी कहै कुम्हार से, तूँ क्यों रूँदै मोहि।
एक दिन ऐसा होयगा, मैं रूदोंगा तोहि॥
मरहिंगे मरि जायँगे, कोइ न लेगा नाम।
उजड़ जाय बसायँगे, छाँड बसना गाम॥
आस पास जोधा खड़े, सभी बजावैं गाल।
माँझ महलसे लै चला, ऐसा काल कराल॥

† हमकाँ ओढावैं चदरिया, चलती बेरियाँ।
प्रानराम जब निकसन लागे, उलट गई दोउ नैन-पुतरिया।
भीतरसे बाहर जब लावै, छूट गई सब महल-अटरिया॥१॥
चार जने मिल खाट उठाइन, रोवत लै चले डगर डगरिया।
कहत कबीर सुनो भाई साधो, सग चली वह सूखी लकरिया॥२॥

and bliss cannot be attained without love of God One cannot hope to derive bliss from worldly objects which are of an evanescent, and transitory nature

Outward Renunciation is not True Renunciation

According to the above exposition one must constantly endeavour to renounce worldly pleasures Of course, this does not consist in leaving one's homestead, parents, wife and children and retiring to the woods True renunciation of worldly enjoyments consists in giving up attachment for such objects of enjoyment So long as attachment persists renunciation of hearth and home can do no good Attachment is due to ignorance caused by *Avidyā* So long as one's intellect is clouded by ignorance one cannot have real freedom from passions That is why the Lord says —

यदा ते मोहकलिल बुद्धिर्व्यतितरिष्यति ।
तदा गन्तासि निर्वेद श्रोतव्यस्य श्रुतस्य च ॥

(*Gita* II 52)

"When thy mind is able to cross the mire of delusion, then thou shalt

be indifferent with what has been heard and is worth hearing"

We should try to shake off this delusion Until and unless the mind gives up its attachment for worldly objects this delusion cannot be overcome through mere outward renunciation A Hindi poet says —

"Well hast thou got thyself clean-shaved by removing the moustaches as well as the beard Thou hast not, however, cleansed thy mind which is yet full of impurities"*

Hence one who seeks liberation should practise real dispassion every day, so that he may easily be rid of the bonds of this perishable world, which are a creation of *Māyā*

तस्मात्तत्साधनं नित्यमाचेष्टव्यं मुमुक्षुभि ।
यतो मायाविलासाद्धि निवृत्त परमश्नुते ॥

This is the only effective means of purging the mind of its infatuation

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* दाढी मूँछ मुँडाइ कै, हुआ जो घोटम घोट ।
मनको क्यों मूँडा नहीं, जामें भरिया खोट ॥

CHAPTER III.

THE HEART'S ASPIRATION

FTER the highest goal of one's life has been determined his mind is no longer attracted by anything else, whether belonging to this world or to the next At this stage the aspirant's heart begins to manifest certain divine virtues, his intellect gradually gets refined and illumined, his senses are

brought under control, his mind is withdrawn from worldly enjoyments and is concentrated on God He finds no difficulty in enduring heat and cold and keeps himself balanced in pleasure and pain He ceases to have any interest in worldly affairs and develops supreme faith in God and the means of realizing Him as well as in the utterances of saints and the Scriptures He no longer labours under the delusion that he would be satisfied by anything else than God or would derive supreme bliss therefrom, and his mind becomes calm and collected He feels no attraction for anything else than God all his activities are directed towards one goal, viz, God-Realization He yearns for God and God alone to the exclusion of everything else This is what they call *Mumukṣā* (desire for liberation) or *Subhechchhā* (noble desire) This *Mumukṣā* can appear even earlier, but then it is generally not so intense The *Mumukṣā* that comes after one has determined his goal, and is preceded by dispassion and unfold-

ment of Sattvic virtues is very intense Śrī Śankarāchārya has mentioned four degrees of *Mumukṣā* and called them तीव्र (intense), मध्यम (moderate), मन्द (mild) and अतिमन्द (extremely mild) "Intense aspiration" represents that stage when the aspirant, sore beset and afflicted by troubles of various kinds, deliberately renounces all his possessions, regarding them as harmful "Moderate aspiration" represents that wavering attitude of mind when one is unable to decide whether it is desirable to remain in this world or to renounce it, even after one has experienced the three types of pain* and intellectually recognized the Supreme state of Existence, viz, the state of *Sat* "Mild aspiration' is that attitude of

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* The three types of pain are (1) आध्यात्मिक, arising from mental and bodily distemper, (2) आधिदैविक, arising from causes altogether beyond human control, such as excessive rainfall, drought, fall of thunderbolt, earthquakes, and so on, and (3) आधिभौतिक, inflicted by other living creatures including human beings

mind which makes one feel, even after the desire for liberation has appeared in him, that there is ample time as yet and that there is no hurry He says to himself, "Let me first attend to my worldly affairs and enjoy worldly pleasures I shall later on find out the means of attaining liberation" There is a fourth class of men who look forward to securing liberation as a wind-fall while enjoying worldly enjoyments, like one who stumbles on a precious jewel while going his way and picks it up The mental attitude of such deluded persons is known as "Extremely mild aspiration" It is only after one has been absolved from all sins as a result of austerities practised through successive lives and worship of the Lord that he is seized with an intense longing for God-Realization Thus seized with a craving for God, a man is able to realize Him during his very life-time—'यस्तु तावन्मुमुक्षु स्यात्स जीवन्नेव मुच्यते" On the appearance of this intense longing the devotee does not like anything else

He applies himself heart and soul to those practices whereby he thinks it possible to attain his Beloved, caring little for this world or the next His longing to see his Beloved makes him mad He is ready to give up his all, his body, mind and riches, nay, even his duties and religious obligations in order to be able to meet his Beloved Everything pales into insignificance before his Beloved He immolates his very being at the altar of his craving for his Beloved

A saint has described the state of such devotees in the following words—

"He who is pining to meet his beloved is not deterred in any way by the distance he has to cover He does not so much as look at the numerous obstacles that present themselves in the way and hurries to where the darling of Nanda plays upon His bewitching Flute"

Such votaries of love care little for their life Their life's passion as well

as all their desires from time without beginning are turned towards one object, viz., their Beloved. Their very soul begins to fly as it were in order to meet the Beloved at the earliest possible moment. A certain writer says "Just as, on an embankment being swept away by rising floods, the volume of water rushes and inundates all the villages beyond it, even so the dam of thirst for worldly pleasures (विषयतृष्णा) being swept away, the powerful and irresistible flood of divine love inundates the whole being of the devotee and sweeps away all impediments and barriers. No worldly temptation, however strong, is able to arrest his onward march, which becomes as rapid as the movement of a love-smitten damsel going to meet her beloved. He turns his face towards Infinity and struggles hard to unite himself with the ocean of supreme bliss. He gives up attachment with his homestead and family and withdrawing his mind from everything else, exclaims with Lalita-kisori, the poet-saint of Brindaban:—

"I would rather roam about in the woods than reside in palaces inlaid with precious stones. I feel happy in lying on bare ground under creepers and have no liking for a bed. I prefer resting my head on one of my arms and never think of a cosy pillow. My mind takes delight in muttering the name of Hari."

"Tarry not, my beloved Mother (Śrī Radhā), pray, cast thy favourable looks on me. Grant the boon that I may roam about on the banks of the Jamuna and frequent the alleys of Gahavar (one of the favourite haunts of child Srī Kṛṣṇa) mornings and evenings. Let me behold the soul-enthralling beauty of the Divine couple (Thyself and Thy Lover Srī Kṛṣṇa) and bring me in close touch with your loving devotees. Lalitakiśorī is afflicted in body and mind and longs for residence in the blessed Brindaban."*

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* बन बन फिरना बेहतर हमको रतनभवन नहि भावै है।
लता तरे पड रहनेमें सुख, नाहिन सेज सुहावै है॥
सोना कर धर सीस भला अति तकिया ख्याल न आवै है।
'ललितकिशोरी' नाम हरीका जपि-जपि मन सचु पावै है॥

The only ambition left in his mind is that of beholding the son of Nanda, the beloved Lord of Vraja, and he expresses the following sentiments —

"The sole desire I cherish in my heart is that I may behold the sportive Lord every day under the banyan tree known by the name of Vamśīvata on the bank of the river Jamuna, that I may lose all consciousness of my body on hearing the heart-captivating notes of His divine Flute, that I may cast away my body and mind in exchange for a thrilling vision of the beautiful limbs of my Beloved, that I may please my beloved Syāmasundara by singing His praises and adorn His beautiful neck with a necklace of *Guñja* seeds and, forgetting the whole world in the ecstasy of that rare joy, may chant the word 'Syāma' and 'Śyāma' alone"

अब बिलब जनि करो लाडिली, कृपा-दृष्टि टुक हेरो।
जमुना पुलिन गलिन गह्वरकी बिचरूँ साँझ-सवेरो॥
निसिदिन निरखों जुगुल-माधुरी, रसिकनते भट-भेरो।
'ललितकिशोरी' तन-मन ब्याकुल श्रीबन चहत बसेरो॥

CHAPTER IV.

STUMBLING-BLOCKS IN THE PATH OF GOD-REALIZATION

GENUINE desire for lasting happiness once stimulated, does not generally grow feeble, but in the beginning the aspirant has to face a number of obstacles Hence one should always be on the alert to guard against them The following are some of the main obstacles:—

Indifferent Health.

The foremost obstacle is loss of health Hence an aspirant should practise self-control and regulate his diet in order to preserve his health One can pursue the path of spirituality only so long as one's health is unimpaired It is well-nigh impossible to carry on spiritual practices with a diseased body Of course, God-Realization, and not the enjoyment of worldly pleasures, should be the object of preserving one's health But it should be remembered at the same time that God-Realization is impossible without spiritual discipline and that a healthy body is indispensable for such discipline Hence one should observe such rules of sleep, work and diet, etc, as may keep his body in sound health Living in natural surroundings, regular exercise and the practice of Asanas (keeping the body in certain Yogic poses) are very beneficial for health

Immoderation in Diet.

The next obstacle is impurity of food and immoderation in diet In nine

cases out of ten it is immoderation in diet which is responsible for impairing the health Nay, it gives rise to mental diseases also That is why our scriptures have laid so much stress on purity of diet Our mind is moulded according to the food we take It is the kind of food one takes that determines his ideas and feelings, his intellect and inclinations Those who take meat, wine and other similar Tamasic substances are found to be very hard-hearted, cruel and ferocious They do not feel any compunction in killing innocent creatures Tamasic and *Rājasic* diet induces evil propensities like lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, pride, jealousy, and so on, which mar the physical and mental health of the aspirant, and the result is that he falls from the path of God-Realization Articles of food containing an abundance of chillies and salt and those which are too sour, too pungent, too bitter, over-hot, or too dry, are classed as Rajasic, while that which is stale, putrid, or impure, or gives a bad smell, and leavings of dishes have been

recognized as Tamasic An aspirant should eschew condiments as far as possible Too much of *ghee* (clarified butter) and sweets, too, is not desirable Curds should also be eschewed Intoxicants should never be taken Costly diet, too, is not suitable for an aspirant, no matter whether he is rich or poor Too much expenditure on food on the part of a wealthy man not only constitutes a vice (प्रमाद) but also exerts an unhealthy influence on those who are not well off It sets a bad example before them and tempts them to follow his ways Even though they have no money, their love of dainty dishes compels them to resort to unfair means such as theft, etc , in order to be able to purchase costly food Food purchased with money got by unfair means exerts an unwholesome influence on the mind, hence food purchased with rightfully earned money is held to be purer than that which, though cooked in the house of a man of high pedigree, has not been so purchased Food cooked in the house of a Sūdra who is truthful,

who earns his livelihood by fair means, who has control over his senses and who is righteous and simple-hearted is purer and more faultless than that served by a man of high pedigree who practises burglary, takes meat, robs others of their dues, is given to chicanery and double-dealing and is addicted to bribery, adultery and wrong-doing, for the food belonging to the former will not corrupt the mind and intellect of one who takes it Again, it is better to take scanty meals as far as possible

Scepticism

The third obstacle is scepticism A man generally betakes himself to spiritual practices on the recommendation of some one but is not able to achieve success immediately, so that he begins to doubt the efficacy of the practices he has undertaken Even good and devout souls are prone to such scepticism From time to time one begins to doubt whether God really exists, and, if he does, whether he will be able to realize Him, whether the practice

he is engaged in is sound or not, had it been sound, he should no doubt have benefited by it, since he has not, there must be something wrong with it. Thoughts of this nature make him slacken his efforts Slackness of practice makes his progress still slower, and this, again, goes to confirm his doubts Thus gradually he abandons the pursuit of *Sādhanā* The first requisite for an aspirant is firm belief in the existence of God The next thing he is required to do is to persevere in his spiritual practices with a strong faith in their efficacy Just as a man suffering from a number of diseases does not notice any improvement even when cured of one or two symptoms by the use of a particular medicine, even so the disappearance of some amount of impurity from a heart which is full of impurities is not perceived But one should entertain the firm conviction that earnest spiritual endeavour can never go in vain, the farther one advances on the path the

more benefited he will feel He will then come to realize that what is heard and said about God is not mere fiction, but unquestionably true

Want of a Sadguru

The guidance of a *Sadguru* (a God-inspired teacher) is necessary to enable one to undertake and diligently pursue such practices It is absence of a *Sadguru* that keeps an aspirant in the dark about true *Sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) and that, again, is responsible for his losing faith in *Sādhanā* (effort) and abandoning it altogether This is a matter requiring serious thought and consideration, for at the present moment there is a great dearth of really selfless and experienced spiritual guides or Sadgurus Although the number of Gurus has considerably increased—you find mushroom growth of them wherever you cast your glance,—most of them are hypocrites, immoral, covetous of others' wealth and wife, seekers of fame and eager to receive homage They style themselves

devotees exclusively attached to God and as highest Jñānīs, nay, even as incarnations of God Himself, though destitute of *Sādhanā* That is why even genuine teachers are held at a discount to-day Under such circumstances it is very difficult to select a *Guru* Nevertheless, as a general test it may be indicated that there is no harm in following the instructions of a selfless man, who does not covet money on any account, who does not seek the company of women or of those who associate with women, with any motive whatsoever, whose dealings are straightforward and honest and whose precepts, if followed, are conducive of real good It is better to avoid the company of Gurus who talk of and seek wealth and women, who preach the cult of spells and incantations, genii, spectres and miracles But on getting into touch with a really good soul, one should never give up the practices recommended by him So long as one does not detect any serious fault in him one should never suspect him and should diligently

pursue the path prescribed by him Changing the *Guru* every now and then causes great confusion in the *Sādhanā*. Even genuine Sādhakas endeavour to attain God through different paths, though the goal is the same, the paths leading to it are many and divergent. Suppose one takes to the practice of *Prānāyāma* (control of breath) to-day at the instance of some instructor and starts practising other forms of *Hathayoga* the next day on the recommendation of another, on the third day he begins to repeat the name of the Lord, and on the fourth he is led by the discourse of a fourth man to reflect on Vedantic truths One cannot succeed in any practice by knocking about like this and changing one's *Sādhanā* every now and then That is why single-minded devotion to one path and strict adherence to the instructions and guidance of a *Sadguru* is very essential for spiritual progress

Want of Regularity

Regularity of habit about retiring to

bed and rising from sleep at a fixed hour, and also about the time of meals is very helpful in developing the power of concentration Want of regularity is a great obstacle in *Sādhanā* Absence of any rule is bound to create disorder in the daily routine, and life is frittered away in a haphazard manner Out of the twenty-four hours of the day one should fix and set apart at least three hours for remembrance of God and meditation In case it is not possible to devote three hours to this work at a stretch, he should divide the period between mornings and evenings, but he should definitely bear in mind that the time, place, pose and procedure of meditation and worship should not be changed every now and then

Publicity

Another very serious obstacle to spiritual progress is the coming of an aspirant into limelight When people come to know that a particular person is given to spiritual pursuits, he

naturally becomes an object of reverence to some people Those who look upon him with reverence begin to pay him their homage The number of persons to whom honour and respect is loathsome has always been very limited in this world An aspirant, after all is a human being, and honour, respect and special attention naturally attract him That is why the more he receives them, the keener grows his desire to win greater honour from a larger number of people The result is that his efforts which were originally directed towards attainment of God are now transferred into a channel for obtaining honour and respect It becomes then his chief objective to perform such actions, to speak such words and to adopt such behaviour and conduct as are calculated to bring him honour Thus even as he grows slack in his spiritual *Sādhanā* his spiritual glow, desirelessness, indifference, straightforwardness and faith in God begin to dwindle, vices like sycophancy, covetousness, partiality, duplicity, irreverence

and a tendency to engage in anti-spiritual activities begin to grow which degrade him and place him under the thumb of his admirers Even these admirers are no longer sincere in their admiration and the homage he receives from them is no longer genuine Eventually the *Sādhaka* and his admirers both deflect from the path of spirituality and fall into the mire of sins Men of Tamasic nature, hostile as they are to those who perform noble deeds and virtuous actions, are never lacking in the world They now get a special opportunity to lower the aspirant and his followers in the eyes of others They employ all their resources to degrade him and his associates and the result is that enmity is established between the two parties The energies on both sides are spent in mutual recrimination and fault-finding, and in trying to humiliate and degrade one another, so that their life becomes miserable and full of unrest The Sattvic heart of the aspirant gets clouded by *Tamas* at this time and is filled with

anger, infatuation and hypocrisy Taking all these disadvantages into consideration an aspirant should never seek to come into the limelight He should try to maintain strict secrecy about his spiritual practices He should never commit the blunder of accepting the role of a preacher or *Āchārya* (head of a religious sect), his welfare lies in people not recognizing him superior to themselves in any way In other words, an aspirant should never give publicity to his spiritual practices or make a display of them He should never regard himself as superior to others, for in that case he will be tempted to pride on his superiority and look down upon others An aspirant who regards himself or shows himself to be more advanced than what he actually is, is bound to fall, nay, there is every risk of his falling even if he discloses his real position in spiritual evolution The welfare of an aspirant lies in the world recognizing him less than what he really is 'Externally appearing quite unassuming

and humble, but internally rising by leaps and bounds in the scale of spiritual evolution'—this is the most salutory method to be pursued by a spiritual aspirant

Sophistry

Another obstacle to spiritual growth is an excessive development of the reasoning faculty It is impossible to maintain one's faith in spiritual practices when one is inclined to raise at every step hair-splitting arguments for the sake only of arguments Want of faith naturally weakens the desire to lead a life of spiritual discipline Though in this age of hypocrisy, double-dealing and, outward show, the development of the reasoning faculty is very necessary to enable one to escape the clutches of impostors and so-called Gurus, who are veritable wolves in sheep's clothing, yet an excessive development of this faculty makes one sceptical, and it becomes extremely difficult for him to

pursue any form of spiritual discipline in right earnest That is why the Lord says 'सशयात्मा विनश्यति' (the doubting man perishes) It is no doubt desirable to have recourse to reasoning for sifting the truth, but it is altogether undesirable to fall back upon sophistry out of obstinacy and pride An aspirant, who has no faith in the scriptures and the words of a *Sadguru*, can never investigate and arrive at the truth. Hence one should always guard against sophistry

Discontinuance of Practice

Another obstacle to spiritual progress is what is known as स्त्यान or discontinuance of practice The mind begins to revolt after one has pursued a particular form of spiritual discipline for some time An aspirant generally takes to a particular form of discipline with very high hopes When these hopes are not realized after some effort on his part, he loses interest in his *Sādhanā* and ultimately gives it up The mind never remains idle When

it withdraws from noble pursuits, it occupies itself with evil projects, and the result is a sure downfall Hence one should never allow his zeal to flag and should not give up his *Sādhanā*

Contentment with Partial Success

Another obstacle is self-satisfaction in the matter of *Sādhanā*, that is, mistaking a partial success for complete success and giving up *Sādhanā* A man engaged in spiritual practices experiences a unique joy as he advances on the path of God-Realization Men who are steeped in the world cannot even dream of that bliss Having tasted a bliss the like of which he had never experienced before, a bliss altogether different from that derived from worldly enjoyments, the aspirant persuades himself to believe that he has attained perfection He forgets that the bliss which he now enjoys is only an iota of the supreme bliss which he had proceeded in search of, that it is only a corner of one of the outhouses of

the royal mansion to which he is bound That is why he rests contented with a small drop of the limitless ocean of unique bliss which he would have otherwise attained, and does not deem it necessary to proceed further A number of auspicious omens appear before aspirants as they proceed along the spiritual path Some find themselves immersed in a vast ocean of tranquillity, others find their mind merged in transcendental bliss, there are still others who visualize the world as overflowing with perennial joy A fourth class of aspirants are blessed with a sight of the supreme effulgence (परम ज्योति) Some, again, hear marvellous divine melodies, while some behold miraculous ecstatic visions All these are auspicious signs, no doubt, but one should never imagine that these are tantamount to attainment of perfection To rest contented with partial success and to cease striving for further progress is a very serious obstacle One can never reach his destination by breaking his journey and settling down

in a wayside inn, taking it to be his permanent abode

Desire

The craving for worldly enjoyments is another obstacle Absence of dispassion is the root-cause of desire An aspirant whose mind is not altogether free from worldly desires has to encounter serious obstacles in the path of God-Realization, for it is desire which gradually takes the form of anger, infatuation, loss of memory, loss of reason and ultimately brings about ruin to the aspirant It is impossible for a mind which always feels drawn towards the objects of senses to remain constantly fixed in God, hence one should always keep the mind under control and free from desires

Want of Continence

Another obstacle to spiritual growth is want of full continence. One cannot achieve success in the path of spirituality without ओजस् the vital

principle And for the maintenance of ओजस् continence is very necessary. An aspirant who belongs to the *Brahmachārī* (celibate) class or is a *Vānaprastha* (an anchorite living in forests) or a *Sannyāsī* (recluse) should invariably observe complete continence Even married men and women should practise continence to the best of their ability in order to be able to tread the path of spirituality They should not hesitate to take a vow of complete continence after they have been blessed with a son But those who tread the path of spirituality should not mind even the absence of a son One is not blessed with a human body merely for the sake of propagation of the species The human body is meant for attaining the supreme wealth, viz, God Hence one should not break the vow of continence, as far as possible, even for the sake of begetting children Of course, it is essential that the vow of continence should be taken by married couples with mutual consent, otherwise

various difficulties may arise Either of the couple who appreciates the value of continence should convince the other of its utility without having recourse to coercion to bring round the latter to his or her views This being done, they should practise continence as far as possible It should always be borne in mind that the more one observes continence the quicker will be his progress in the path of God-Realization

Undesirable Company

Another serious obstacle is bad company Even those who are much advanced in spirituality are found lapsing into sin under the influence of bad company The company of those who actually indulge in sinful deeds should invariably be avoided, nay, the company of even those who, though proclaiming themselves saints, devotees, Yogīs, or Jñānīs (enlightened souls), appear to possess vices like chicanery and double-dealing, luxury and self-indulgence, love

of wealth and woman, love of idle gossip, censure of others, pride, arrogance, villainy and hypocrisy, etc, is bad company For those who possess all these vices can never be true saints, devotees, Yogīs or Jñānīs

Bad company induces disrespect for God, true religion, morality and spiritual practices One who hears it said now and then "Of what use is good company? Where is God? Of what utility is *Dharma*?" naturally develops disrespect for all these Similarly, constant talk of worldly enjoyments begets fondness for them, and hearing of others' weaknesses arouses contempt and dislike for those people Desires for women, wealth, progress, honour, etc, crop up and develop, a tendency for captious reasoning increases Rajasic and Tamasic propensities receive encouragement Vices like dissimulation, pride, arrogance, anger, violence and ignorance begin to appear in the heart Selfishness and hypocrisy grow The mind becomes restless

There are very few people in this world who never entertain evil ideas in their minds, for accumulated impressions of evil deeds committed in the immediate or remote past linger in the mind of almost every one of us One who has performed purely good deeds in the past will not get a human body, which is a result of accumulated actions (सञ्चित कर्म) of a mixed type Ideas that crop up in one's mind originate from impulses of accumulated actions Evil ideas, however, are not translated into action, if one's faculty of discrimination is strong In such cases they disappear as soon as they arise in the mind If, however, such ideas receive encouragement through bad company, they become irresistible They arise in the form of ripples and take no time in developing into a vast ocean, which engulfs an aspirant and turns him from the path of God-Realization once for all

Bad company does not consist in association of undesirable men alone

The country, surroundings, literature, pictures, ideas and thoughts or even words which induce bad ideas are all included in bad company One should not live in a place the atmosphere of which is predominantly Tamasic One should not witness dramatic performances, games, cinema shows, pictures or other sights which tend to stimulate lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, pride, rancour etc One should never read books or periodicals which are likely to arouse evil ideas in the mind Most of the newspapers of to-day contain articles and illustrations which foster the fault-finding and reviling tendencies of the mind and the desire for acquiring objects of enjoyment One should therefore avoid them as far as possible It is never desirable to listen to and dwell on topics which are likely to create evil impressions on the mind One should give up hearing and speaking words which may sow the seeds of and promote hatred, rancour, enmity, lust, anger, avarice, etc An aspirant should also avoid as

far as possible the company of those who are given to adultery, and indulge in wrong-doing, who bear ill-will against others without any rhyme or reason, who denounce saints, holy men and scriptures, who disprove the existence of God, who are hypocrites, who are proud, given to vilifying others, greedy, unjust and captious

Fault-finding

Another stumbling-block in the path of God-Realization is finding fault with others An aspirant should have nothing to do with what others do He should constantly apply himself to the work of self-purification An aspirant should be always so busy with his own spiritual practices that he should have no time to perceive the faults of others Those who cultivate the habit of looking at others' faults cannot remain steady, much less advance, on the path of God-Realization All aspirants would do well to remember the following couplet of Śri Narayana Swami —

तेरे भावे जो करो भलो बुरो ससार।
नारायन तू बैठिके अपनो भवन बुहार॥

"Let the world do what it may, be it good or evil Narayana, you should keep quiet and put your own house in order"

When the faults of others cease to come to view, there can be no question of criticizing them One should observe one's own faults only and try to eradicate them as far as possible

Sectarianism

Another serious obstacle is sectarianism This makes even the good points of others appear as objectionable on account of their not being sanctioned or approved by one's own sect or creed This does not mean that an aspirant should give up his fidelity to the traditional line of teachers of the school to which he may belong, or that he should cease to follow with faith and devotion the spiritual discipline chalked out for him by a *Sadguru* It is, in

fact, the highest duty of an aspirant strictly to adhere to the instructions and teachings of a *Sadguru*, but it is never desirable to use reproachful language against other faiths or look down upon others, and criticize, expose or refute the conception of God and spiritual discipline of others, or attach exclusive importance to external form and practice, out of sectarian bias

CHAPTER IV.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTORY TO SPIRITUAL ADVANCEMENT

SPIRITUAL discipline or *Sādhanā* should be pursued with great diligence and application, bravely brushing aside obstacles and difficulties that may come in the way The sage Patañjali says in his *Aphorisms of Yoga* —

स तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारासेवितो दृढभूमि ।

(I 14)

"Practice becomes firmly rooted only when it is repeated regularly and in right earnest for a long time" Three things have been inculcated herein, viz, (1) that practice should be continued for a considerable length of time, (2) that it should be pursued without interruption, and (3) that it should be carried on in right earnest and with devotion

Long Practice

It is not possible to attain the Reality, the goal of all spiritual discipline, through inadequate effort One should go on with the *Sādhanā* so long as the desired goal is not reached It is not necessary to give up *Sādhanā* even after the goal has been reached When the spiritual life is begun a course of discipline is undertaken as a means to an end, and after the end has been realized the practice becomes habitual with the practicant He becomes reluctant even out of gratitude to give up a practice which enabled him to attain the object of his desire

People who aspire to achieve great results through inadequate effort and shirk labour, whose nature is to malinger, generally fail in the path of God-Realization The traveller in this path must be daily and hourly fed with a new zeal, a new and undying faith Those who are slothful and get tired after a small amount of exertion cannot tread this path An earnest seeker will proclaim like the Buddha —

इहासने शुष्यतु मे शरीर त्वगस्थिमास प्रलय च यातु ।
अप्राप्य बोधि बहुकल्पदुर्लभ नेवासनात् कायमनश्चलिष्यते ॥

"Let my body be shrivelled up on this seat, let my skin, bones and flesh wear away, this body of mine shall never stir from this seat until I have attained wisdom, which is difficult to attain even through *Sādhanā* pursued through a number of æons "

Such a seeker cares not for length of time He is bent on attaining the object of his desire, no matter how much time it may take

Ceaseless Effort

Long practice does not mean that

one should continue practice for years together without any system When the impulse comes, or when there is time, something is done, otherwise the practice is deferred for some days One who is truly and fully in earnest in spiritual practice can never proceed like this One whose throat is totally parched cannot be satisfied with anything else than water He will remain uneasy till water is obtained, and every moment till the thirst is satisfied he will think of nothing else than water Similarly, one who is athirst for God would not rest content even for a moment, he would remain absorbed in thoughts of God day and night Everything else than the course of spiritual discipline he is engaged in, will have a secondary importance for him

Faith and Reverence

An aspirant who is thus engaged in constant practice does his work with a heart full of great reverence and devotion Those who carry on their *Sādhanā* like one engaged in forced labour or do it in a

desultory and half-hearted manner have no respect for it One cannot derive full benefit from a *Sādhanā* unless one has got respect for it He who pursues spiritual discipline simply for show, or merely as a diversion or re-creation, has really no faith in his *Sādhanā*

A devout aspirant pursues spiritual discipline as his paramount duty in life It is essential, therefore, that an aspirant should have full faith in the *Sādhanā* in which he is engaged Without this faith it is not possible to achieve success in any undertaking whatsoever The Lord says in the *Gītā* —

अश्रद्धया हुतं दत्तं तपस्तप्तं कृतं च यत् ।
असदित्युच्यते पार्थ न च तत्प्रेत्य नो इह ॥
(XVII 28)

"Whatsoever is wrought without faith, —oblation, gift, austerity, or any other deed, null is it called, O Pārtha, it is nought, here or hereafter"

Faith is the sheet-anchor of an aspirant One who is devoid of faith is

eventually compelled to give up his *Sādhanā*, unnerved by the knocks of doubt and sophistical reasoning

Living in Seclusion

The Lord has enjoined a life of seclusion and aversion to the company of men (विविक्तदेशसेवित्वमरतिर्जनसंसदि) in case of those who tread the path of Knowledge For maturing one's *Sādhanā* it is very necessary to live in seclusion But in the majority of cases such seclusion becomes harmful when the practice is started abruptly and carried on for a length of time to the exclusion of all other activity and responsibility without developing the fullest attachment to spiritual practices or *Sādhanā* Hence a beginner would be well advised to retire into solitude for an hour only, to begin with, for practising meditation and saying his prayers to God He should extend the period gradually if he finds that his mind is not harassed in solitude by frivolous thoughts, indolence and drowsiness One should try one's best to

set apart at least one day in every week, four or five days in a month, and a month in every year, and devote the periods solely to spiritual practices and contemplation of God The wholesome spiritual food that the mind will get from such a programme will be very helpful in preserving the mind in a state of health

But he who takes to a solitary life without previous practice exposes himself to the risk of falling a victim to frivolous pursuits, sloth, drowsiness, evil practices and other vices of a Tamasic nature Since he is not habituated to *Sādhanā,* time begins to hang heavy on his head, and, having no ordinary work to do, he falls an easy prey to frivolities and slothfulness The tendency perceived in a large number of friars and recluses of the present day to smoke and take intoxicating drugs, to indulge in idle gossip and worldly talk is mainly attributable to the fact that they have ample time at their disposal but no work That is why,

falling in bad company, they contract a number of vices Sons of aristocrats and well-to-do persons get spoiled mostly because they have ample time but no work They have to discover vain pursuits in order to while away their time Human life is too precious to be frittered away in playing cards, dice and chess, in idle gossip and tattling about others, sleeping away the whole day, and reaping a rich harvest of sins Hence while realizing the necessity of living in solitude and gradually lengthening its period for practising remembrance of God, an aspirant should keep himself engaged in some responsible work, no matter whether it is public service or one's own private work,—every good work performed in a spirit of dedication to God and free from attachment being reckoned as His worship The mind, when engaged in some useful work, will hardly get any time to indulge in idle thoughts or frivolous pursuits Contemplation on God should not be given up even while

doing one's work and duties should be performed while fixing the mind all the time on God That is why the Lord said to Arjuna "मामनुस्मर युध्य च" (at all times think of Me alone and fight) One should never deliberately shirk one's legitimate duties and responsibilities, but should discharge them with the mind fixed on the Lord Remembrance of God first and performance of duty afterwards The Lord speedily redeems those who perform their duties for His sake with their minds fixed on as pointed above The Lord Himself says—

तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
भवामि नचिरात्पार्थ मय्यावेशितचेतसाम् ॥

(*Gita* XII 7)

"These I speedily rescue from the ocean of birth and death, O Pārtha, their minds being fixed on Me"

Real seclusion consists in the absolute merging of one's mind in God External seclusion is resorted to only with a view to securing this inner seclusion

Holiness in Conduct

An aspirant should always maintain a high standard of holiness in his dealings with the world To endure sufferings and hardships calmly, to repay anger with forgiveness, hatred with love, imprecations with benedictions and injury with service, to regard oneself as the humblest of all creatures, to arrogate no importance to one's own self, to find fault with none, to treat no one with contempt, to look upon another's wife as one's own mother or an image of God, to have moderation in diet and recreation, to sp ak sparingly to refrain from useless talk, to speak truthful and agreeable words, to keep oneself ready to serve all to the best of one's ability without assertion of the claim to be recognized as a servant of the public, to reckon the services rendered by him as a necessary part of his duties rather than an obligation on others, to observe defects in the services rendered and to do one's best to remedy them, to expect no return

for services rendered, to bear himself humbly before all, to behave politely with every one, to please one's parents, teachers and other elders by service, to give up as poison the desire for honour and distinction, to shun a place where one is likely to receive honour and distinction, to avoid all chances of hearing one's own praise, to feel compassion for the poor and to prepare oneself for the greatest sacrifice in their cause, to avoid participation in any work of arbitration, to keep himself aloof from societies and associations, to abstain from literature not helpful to spiritual advancement, to shun as far as possible weddings and other functions and large gatherings of men, never to condemn other faiths, to be guileless and straightforward in one's dealings with others and to be always careful to avoid hypocrisy, etc are included in saintly conduct The more one develops these virtues, the more he will advance on the path of spiritual discipline

An aspirant should always carefully observe in what direction the barge of his life is proceeding If he finds that it is moving in the direction of divine virtues, it should be understood that he is advancing, if, however, he finds that it is proceeding in the wrong direction, it should be taken as an index of retrogression This is a test which never fails Devotion or wisdom does not consist in the mere talk of it. This should be taken as an axiomatic truth Those who are advancing on the path of devotion or wisdom must needs manifest divine virtues *

Caution against Sins

Finally, an aspirant should always beware of sins A sinful propensity

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* For a detailed exposition of the divine and demoniac qualities see Chapter XVI of the *Gita* If possible, one should read this chapter and muse on its contents every day and make full endeavour to develop divine qualities and get rid of demoniac qualities

always arises in the mind like a ripple, but, if allowed to stay, it assumes great dimensions in no time and engulfs the victim Hence even the slightest tinge of a sin should never be ignored, no matter whether it is bodily or mental The presence of a snake or an armed bandit in one's house is not so dangerous as that of the minutest sin in one's mind.

Some people irresponsibly say that sin is ingrained in human nature or that it is decreed by Providence that a man should commit sins, but this is entirely wrong It is neither in the nature of a human being to commit sins, nor is it decreed by Providence that he should do so Such ingenious arguments are advanced only by those habitual sinners who, though indulging in sins, seek to exonerate themselves by laying the blame at the door of human nature or Providence But these are nothing but figments of feeble minds Human nature, on the contrary, guards us against sins and helps us to

develop those propensities which take us nearer the ultimate truth Sins are ultimately traceable to our attachment to sense-enjoyments, one cannot realize the truth without ridding oneself of this attachment Attachment to sense-enjoyments is a characteristic of brutes man mistaking it to be human nature, has kept himself aloof from the spiritual world That is why we fall into the clutches of pain over and over again Hence we should purge our minds of all evil tendencies. To entertain even the smallest sin in one's mind is to pave the way for eternal tortures in hell God has endowed man with a faculty by using which he can, if he so chooses, make himself proof against all trace of sins It is therefore that the Lord has enjoined man to be on his guard and to kill desire, his invincible enemy, which is the germ of all sins —

जहि शत्रु महाबाहो कामरूप दुरासदम् ।

(*Gita* III 43)

Faith in God

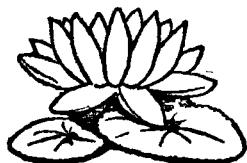
A sovereign remedy for preventing an aspirant from deflecting from the path of spiritual discipline is unflinching faith in God An aspirant who has obtained an insight into the secret of Divine grace and mercy and God's generosity, benevolence and love, and has faith in Him can never be despondent The fact that we deviate from our *Sādhanā* at every step is mainly attributable to our lack of faith in God The Lord says, "He who knows Me to be the friend of all, attains supreme peace"* This is quite natural Once we recognize God to be our friend, we, strengthened by His strength and armed by our faith in Him, are able to get rid of our attachment to worldly enjoyments and sins That we do not recognize God to be our eternal friend is our greatest misfortune An aspirant should have a firm conviction that God

* सुहृदं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमृच्छति ॥

(Gita)

is his true friend, his eternal comrade, that He always guards him against sins and that he should only take refuge in Him and remember Him and leave the rest to Him. An aspirant who does so with supreme faith surmounts all obstacles without fail and attains God The Lord says "He who fixes his mind on Me, easily overcomes all obstacles by My grace"

मच्चित्त सर्वदुर्गाणि मत्प्रसादात्तरिष्यसि ।

(Gita XVIII, 58)

CHAPTER VI.

HUMBLE SUPPLICATION TO THE LORD

AN excellent spiritual exercise for aspirants is to weep before the Lord with an open heart and in a piteous and pathetic manner This should, however, be practised in solitude If done before others, it may cause

annoyance to them and may degenerate into hypocrisy In the morning or evening, at night or after midnight, or better still at sunrise, when one is all by himself, he should squat easily on a mat and picture to his mind that the Lord is present in person before him and that He is hearing each and every word of his and also watching him Even according to the avowed principles of *Vedānta*, it is perfectly true that the Lord is present everywhere at every time and watches all that we do, and hears all that we say If our suggestion is strong enough, the form in which we want to visualize the Lord appears before our mental eyes, and, if our love for Him develops to the desired extent, we may actually perceive the Lord through His grace

The aspirant should squat on a mat or on the bare ground at a fixed hour and, as far as possible, on a fixed spot every day and, picturing the Lord to be present before him

and recollecting the sins committed by him during the whole day, should confess everything before Him and, filled with great remorse, he should beg forgiveness of the Lord in a pathetic way and invoke necessary strength to deter him from sins in future

He should then pray to the Lord with an open heart in the following words, or something like that —

"There is no one so crooked, wicked and lustful as myself I am so ungrateful as to forget my own Creator I have been running after sensual pleasures stuffing my belly like a country swine Giving up the company of saints and devotees of God, I am engaged day and night in the service of those who have turned their faces away from God There is no sinner greater than I, nay, I am the most notorious of all those who are sunk in vice This depraved soul has

no refuge except Thee, O Lord of Lakṣmī"*

O friend of the poor, where am I to go leaving Thy beloved feet? There is in this world, none other than Thee, O Protector of the helpless, who will cast merciful looks on me There is no end to my sins, O Lord, I get despondent when I look into my sins, and see no way of my redemption even in millions of births, but as soon as I remember your vow, I am filled with hope and am reminded of the reassuring words you addressed to your friend and devotee Arjuna on the battle-field —

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक्।
साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः॥

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* मो सम कौन कुटिल खल कामी।
जिन तनु दियो ताहि बिसरायो, ऐसो नमकहरामी॥
भरि भरि उदर विषयकों धायो जैसे सूकर ग्रामी।
हरिजन छाडि हरीबिमुखनकी निसिदिन करत गुलामी॥
पापी कौन बड़ो है मोतें, सब पतितनमें नामी।
सूर पतित कों ठौर कहाँ है तुम बिनु श्रीपति स्वामी॥

क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छान्तिं निगच्छति ।
कौन्तेय प्रति जानीहि न मे भक्त प्रणश्यति ॥
सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेक शरण व्रज ।
अह त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुच ॥

"Even if the most sinful worship Me with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous, for he hath rightly resolved Speedily he becomes virtuous and goes to eternal peace, O son of Kuntī, know thou for certain that My devotee never perishes"

"Relinquishing dependence on all sorts of virtues, come unto Me alone for shelter, sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins"

How inspiring and encouraging these words are! Who else than Thee can evince such large-heartedness? "There is no one so magnanimous as Thou"* But I know not how to worship Thee with an undivided heart and take refuge in Thee alone I

* ऐसो को उदार जग माही ।

have wasted countless lives and even the present life so far in slavish attachment to sensual pleasures They alone have appeared lovely to me I know not the way to please Thee or to betake myself to Thee Of course, the blows of worldly pleasures have grown unbearable to me now Do therefore remember Thy vow, my Lord, and take me under Thy protection and make me strong enough not to forget Thy bewitching form and sacred name even for a moment

O Friend of the miserable ! who else is there to commiserate the miserable ?

"There is no one so charitably disposed and kind to the poor as Thou art Whomsoever I approach with my tale of woe I find miserable like myself There are so many masters among gods, men, sages, and demons, but they are so only so long as Thou art favourably disposed towards them It is well-known in all the three

worlds and in all ages, and all the four Vedas declare it, that Thy supremacy exists at all times, namely, in the beginning, middle and end After begging of Thee one no longer remains a beggar hearing of Thy benevolent nature, kindly disposition and good fame, I have come to beg a boon of Thee O Darling of Dasaratha, Thou hast accepted as Thy own even slabs of stone (Ahalyā), beasts, plants and birds (like Jatāyu), and transformed paupers into kings Thou art the protector of the poor and I am a poor creature calling myself Thine Pray acknowledge me only once as Thine "*

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* दीनको दयालु दानी दूसरो न कोउ।
जासों दीनता कहों हों देखौं दीन सोऊ ॥ १ ॥
सुर नर मुनि असुर नाग साहिब तौ घनेरे।
तौ लौं जौ लौं रावरे न नेकु नयन फेरे ॥ २ ॥
त्रिभुवन तिहुँ काल बिदित बेद बदत चारी।
आदि अंत मध्य राम साहिबी तिहारी ॥ ३ ॥
तोहि मागि मागनो न मागनो कहायो।
सुनि सुभाव सील सुजसु जाचन जन आयो ॥ ४ ॥

O refuge of outcast beggars! there is no one else who hugs poor miserable creatures to his bosom like Thee Even he who is detested by the whole world, nay, who is deserted by his own dear and near ones and to whom no one likes even to speak, receives Thy protection You take him forthwith in your arms and begin to fondle him and, clasping him to your bosom, make him fearless You gave shelter to Vibhīsana, who was haunted by fear of Rāvana, with great warmth of feeling, You assumed the form of cloth for the sake of Draupadī, the consort of Pāndavas, it was You who ran bare-footed to rescue the chief of elephants on hearing his invocation I can recall no sinner from whom You have kept back Your mercy after he has called You

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पाहन पसु बिटप बिहग अपने करि लीन्हे।
महाराज दसरथके रक राय कीन्हे॥ ५॥
तूँ गरीबको निवाज, हौं गरीब तेरो।
बारक कहिये कृपालु तुलसिदास मेरो॥ ६॥

O Bestower of safety, I take refuge in Thee with all my being, I am Thine, pray take me under Thy benign care, my Lord!

"Thou art compassionate, O Lord! and I am deserving of compassion, Thou art a donor and I am a beggar. I am a notorious sinner and Thou art the destroyer of sins Thou art a protector of the forlorn, and is there anyone so forlorn as I? There is no one so afflicted as I and no allayer of suffering as Thou. Thou art the Universal Soul, and I the individual soul, Thou art my Master, I Thy slave, Thou art my father and mother, teacher and friend, and my well-wisher in every way, Thou art related to me in so many ways, treat me as it pleases Thee O merciful Lord! this slave of Thine seeks protection at Thy feet, in whatsoever way it may be available to him."*

* तूँ दयालु, दीन हौं, तूँ दानी, हौं भिखारी।
हौं प्रसिद्ध पातकी, तूँ पापपुंजहारी ॥ १

O Reclaimer of the fallen! O protector of the afflicted, O Ocean of mercy! whether virtuous or wicked, I am Thine and have taken refuge in Thee O wealth of the poor, O refuge of the lowly, O Bestower of alms on beggars! I want nothing else I do not aspire for wisdom or control of mind, penance or muttering of spells, riches or honour, learning or intelligence, wife or son, an abode in heaven or the nether regions or any other object or position I do not covet Paradise (वैकुण्ठ) or the Highest Abode, nay, not even emancipation or final beatitude I long for one thing only, viz, that you should count me as Thy bond-slave, only say once that I am

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नाथ तूँ अनाथको, अनाथ कौन मो सो।
मो समान आरत नहिं, आरतिहर तो सो ॥ २ ॥
ब्रह्म तूँ, हौं जीव हौं, तूँ ठाकुर, हौं चेरो।
तातु मातु गुरु सखा, तूँ सब बिधि हितु मेरो ॥ ३ ॥
तोहि मोहि नाते अनेक, मानिए जो भावे।
ज्यों त्यों तुलसी कृपालु चरन सरन पावे ॥ ४ ॥

Thine Like Goswami Tulasidas I also pray that I may never be rid of the pride that I am Thy servant and that Thou art my Master

That is all Let me roam about fearlessly in the world, steeped in this pride And, wherever I go, let me behold the gracious hand of the Lord over my head at all times

"O my Lord, O my sole refuge, O protector of my life! I have laid myself at Thy door, relying on Thy spontaneous mercy Where am I to go? There is no one prepared to give me shelter except Thyself I have knocked about here and there and tried all, but could not get anything and only forfeited my credit Far from giving me shelter, no one even cared to look at me In this way they did a good turn to me in-as-much as they opened my eyes, and dispelled all false notions I thus became despondent and felt dejected and lost all faith in worldly enjoyments. Now I have come to know the true

worth of sensual enjoyments, which, though appearing attractive at first sight, are like so many diseases Now I find no supporter other than Thyself, just as a sea-gull hovering about a ship gets no other perching-ground O Ocean of mercy ! take compassion on me now and open the gates of Thy mansion soon Let me have a glimpse of Thy bewitching form, my Lord, and let me hear Thy enchanting voice May that divine melody resound through every pore of my skin and let the chord of my heart beat in consonance with that melody Let this frame of mine be thrilled with joy and the bud of my heart open out all its petals and let Thy blessed feet dance on those petals like a honey-intoxicated bee Let me be driven into raptures and forget all about my body and mind and then behold Thy bewitching form in every particle of matter O Lord ! let my name be registered as Thy slave and let me strengthen myself with Thy strength, so that all sins and afflictions may be scared

away and never come again knowing me to be Thy servant."

We can derive great strength by praying in this manner daily The aspirant becomes fearless when he is convinced that he is a servant of the Lord and that the Lord is his Master. Delusion and infatuation, sins and afflictions can no longer approach him When an ordinary policeman fears none being armed with the feeling of his being a Government servant and wields his authority over the biggest citizen, there can be no limit to the strength of the man who has been registered as a servant of the Lord of the whole universe, who is capable of doing, undoing and redoing things (कर्तुमकर्तुमन्यथाकर्तुम्) Not only does such a devotee become fearless himself but he is also able to make other fear-stricken creatures of the world fearless

CHAPTER VII.

SELF-SURRENDER TO THE LORD

SELF-surrender to the Lord is by far the highest, yet the easiest road to success for an aspirant To dedicate oneself to the sacred feet of the Lord is the secret of the teachings of all the scriptures and marks the culmination of all spiritual discipline It was this supreme secret which the Blessed Lord disclosed in the

end of the *Gītā* to His beloved friend and devotee Arjuna, after He had finished His discourse on Knowledge (ज्ञान) and Wisdom (विज्ञान), Devotion and Action, etc It is through this supreme discipline that an aspirant can attain to the highest pinnacle of spiritual advancement

Self-surrender does not mean that one should abandon his duties in life and sit idle, with his hands and feet withdrawn from activity Some of us wrongly believe that it is God who does everything and makes us do what He likes, that it is His energy that is functioning in all of us and that our duty simply is to sit quiet This is, however, a great mistake Self-surrender does not consist in inactivity In the act of self-surrender it is the Self (*Ātmā*) that is surrendered first of all, and along with it the mind, the ego, the intellect and the body are surrendered to the Lord This being done, the aspirant distinctly begins to feel that it is the Lord who is functioning

through his body, mind and speech Prior to this he believed that it was he himself who did everything, whereas now he feels that it is God who is doing everything on his behalf The consciousness that he is the doer merges in the cosmic Consciousness, for the mind and intellect have been surrendered to the Lord. The mind and the intellect cease to function independently at this stage, the Divine will is his will now, the Divine thought is his thought, and the Divine activity is his activity If the Lord has no ideation, volition and conation the devotee, too, must have none of these, for the inner sense (अन्त करण), consisting of the mind and the intellect, which is needed for these has become the Lord's property The devotee ceases to have any control over it That is why the Lord takes the whole responsibility in respect of such a devotee He says—"With mind and intellect dedicated to Me, thou shalt doubtless come to Me" (मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्मामेवैष्य-स्यसशयम्) The Lord, however, nowhere

enjoins us to relinquish actions and become inactive, for in the same couplet He says "सर्वेषु कालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च" (at all times think of Me alone and fight) He asks Arjuna to engage in battle, bearing in mind all the time that whatever is going on in the world is a mere sport of the Lord and that every action is inspired by Him, he being a mere tool in His hand, an automaton operated by that supreme Engineer and entirely subordinate to His will It was in this spirit that Arjuna, giving up all considerations of right and wrong, declared in unequivocal terms that all his doubts had vanished and that he would do as the Lord bade him to do

Such an aspirant does not care to renounce action or the world, nor does he feel disinclined to do so He deems it a proud privilege to continue to be used as a tool in the hands of the Lord To him the world is no longer insentient, he sees consciousness and consciousness alone manifesting itself

everywhere and at every time He looks upon the whole universe as an image of the Lord and all activity as a divine sport (लीला), that is why he always takes part in that game and serves Him in the shape of the universe But while doing so he never feels that he is serving the world or performing his duty, for he has no duties left now A puppet, for instance, has no sense of duty, it only dances at the pull of the hidden showman Nor is it necessary for him to have any sense of duty, for he has made over his reins to an expert driver To say nothing of worldly enjoyments, which are of little consequence, nay, quite worthless, and which an aspirant would not care even to look at,—for they no longer appear to him as anything apart from the Divine sport—even the highest celestial regions are nothing but a scene of His sport and are no longer able to attract him for personal enjoyment he always regards himself as a plaything in the hands of the sportive Lord Wherever the Lord may enact

His enchanting eternal sport, which is going on uninterrupted everywhere, he always finds himself in the hands of the Divine Lord and never goes out of His sight Why, then, should he seek to have himself shifted from one scene of the game to another, or demur if he is so shifted? Of course, he does not agree to his being dissociated from the game or kept out of sight if such a proposal ever comes before him This is what the Lord says in the following verse of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* —

सालोक्यसार्ष्टिसामीप्यसारूप्यैकत्वमप्युत ।
दीयमान न गृह्णन्ति विना मत्सेवन जना ॥

"My devotees do not accept even the five kinds of liberation in exchange for My service"

Such a devotee does nothing in reality even though performing all his worldly duties His service of humanity, his embarking in business, his displaying valour on the field of battle, and his imparting knowledge, everything is a

part of the Divine *Līlā* He fares in the world as a clever and dutiful actor in this Divine drama His actions and inclinations to perform those actions are, therefore, not egoistic but God-inspired Such a devotee, whose actions are a part of the Divine *Līlā* is ever free from the bondage of actions in the shape of good and evil consequences The Lord is ever present with him, inasmuch as the strings of his life are always in His hands Salvation is doubtless eager to woo him and to be taken into his service and sometimes even goes to the length of hugging his feet A Sanskrit poet has beautifully expressed this idea in the following verse —

> घन कामोऽस्माक तव तु भजनेऽन्यत्र न रुचि-
> स्तवैवाङ्घ्रिद्वन्द्वे नतिषु रतिरस्माकमतुला ।
> सकामे निष्कामा सपदि तु सकामा पदगता
> सकामास्मान् मुक्तिर्भजति महिमाय तव हरे ॥

"Our heart is set on Thy remembrance only, O Lord, we have no liking for anything else We are extremely fond

of bowing to Thy lotus-like feet alone. Yet, this maiden of *Mukti* (salvation) having rejected the overtures of those who are fond of worldly enjoyments and finding no shelter elsewhere, clings to our feet with great fondness and begins to serve us ! Such is Thy Divine glory, O Lord" Such devotees do not like to fall into the clutches of *Mukti* even though she woos them The whole responsibility in respect of such advanced aspirants naturally rests with God He even proclaimed to Arjuna —

अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुच ॥

"I shall absolve thee from all sins, sorrow not"

We are hopelessly dull-headed, incredulous and wanting in faith Having fallen a prey to various temptations and being repeatedly frustrated in our efforts, we have become sceptics The mean craving for worldly enjoyments and the flowery utterances, contained

in the Śāstras, prescribing certain religious rites as a means of procuring such enjoyments have cast a spell of delusion over us That is why we do not repose full faith in the aforementioned loving assurance of the Lord and do not dedicate ourselves exclusively to Him And hence it is that we are falling into troubles of various kinds and leading a life of unrest and misery, and wearied and oppressed like a traveller who has lost his way We know not what to do Indeed we have been reduced to a pitiable condition and in order to rid ourselves of this condition we should practise self-surrender to God with a resolute will We should further try to feel divine inspiration in every action of ours, to remain cheerful in every circumstance, taking both pleasure and pain to be His merciful dispensation, and to perform our duties like an automaton without any selfish interest and with our thoughts always fixed on Him

It is, however, not enough simply to repeat the words "I am at Thy mercy, O Lord", "I have dedicated myself to Thee", and so on What we are to do is to dedicate to Him all that we call our own Every resolve, every reflection, every thought, every desire and every action, proceeding from the ego, the mind, the intellect and the body, will have to be dedicated to Him The mind and the senses, which are running after worldly enjoyments, will have to be reined in and turned towards God And one need only take shelter in order to rid himself of all fears The following declaration of Lord Śrī Rāma, contained in the *Rāmāyana* of Valmiki is literally true—

सकृदेव प्रपन्नाय तवास्मीति च याचते ।
अभय सर्वभूतेभ्यो ददाम्येतद्व्रत मम ॥

"Whoever takes refuge in Me only once and seeks My protection with the words 'I am Thine', I grant him protection against all creatures this is My vow"

This vow of the Lord is quite true One has merely to dedicate oneself to the Lord once in order to become fearless for all time to come In fact, self-surrender is effected only once Surrender means giving away Making over and taking over are simultaneous acts which take place only once A thing made over or taken over once is transferred for good As a matter of fact, we do not dedicate ourselves to Him even once The word "surrender" is no doubt familiar to us, but we know not what it means Our wisdom, our meditation and our prayers are either for show or are actuated by a desire of procuring worldly enjoyments Our thoughts are always flowing towards the world, just as rivers are incessantly flowing towards the ocean How can we be fearless under such circumstances? The Lord, who dwells in the hearts of all of us, would not be caught by our empty talks We are haunted by fears of various kinds For instance, we are afraid of our own death or that of our son, of loss

of fortune, reputation or prestige, and that of displeasing our family and community, and many more things too numerous to mention

In fact, we have gathered a host of fears around us That is why we feel nervous even in giving up such a trifling thing as tobacco lest it may have a prejudicial effect on our health, hesitate in breaking the most pernicious custom for fear of public opinion or of displeasing the community and feel a trepidation in stating a fact for fear of the Government It is on account of these fears that we grovel in sins of various kinds This fear is known as a characteristic of the demoniac or unspiritual disposition How can we dedicate ourselves to God so long as we go on adding to the stock of our sins under the influence of this demoniac disposition The blessed Lord Himself says —

न मा दुष्कृतिनो मूढा प्रपद्यन्ते नराधमा ।
माययापहृतज्ञाना आसुर भावमाश्रिता ॥

(*Gita* VII 15)

"The evil-doing, the deluded, the vilest of men, they come not to Me, they who have been robbed of their wisdom by illusion (*Māyā*) and who have embraced the nature of demons"

Crushing these fears, trampling them under feet we shall have to proceed onward with steady and unfaltering steps Then alone shall we be eligible for that fearless state the attainment of which will enable us to dedicate ourselves completely to the Lord

A Parable

Some people, getting sick of living in a distant land, wanted to return to their village home They had their home somewhere at the foot of the Himalyas in the north of India But, forgetting this, they started southward Homesick as they were, they began to proceed swiftly in the wrong direction On the way, however, they met a few of their own co-villagers, who

knew the right road and were proceeding towards the north The latter were surprised to find their friends moving in the opposite direction and enquired as to where they were going Their friends replied that they were going homeward They all belonged to the same village The latter, then, told their misguided friends that they were all going in the opposite direction and were getting farther and farther from the village They also warned their friends that if they went further they would find the return journey extremely difficult, as there was no resting-place on that road, no trees for shelter and no water to drink Hot winds blowing in that region would blight their bodies, the journey would bring them great fatigue and not a drop of water would be available anywhere even if they died for very thirst They therefore exhorted their friends to give up the wrong road they had taken and follow them along the right and straight path they were treading But most of these

unfortunate fellows did not care even to listen to this wholesome advice For they thought spending any time in listening to that talk would mean so much delay in reaching home Others patiently heard what their friends told them but on careful consideration they came to the conclusion that their friends' advice did not contain much sense They, too, therefore continued their journey in the opposite direction There were still others who paused for a while and mused over the words of their friends They even turned round, looked at the right path and realized their mistake and were even inclined to follow the right track, but they were too fond of their companions to part company with them and resumed the wrong track even though doubtful of its correctness Some of these halted at some distance and after careful deliberation turned back, whereas others were prevailed upon by their companions and resumed their journey in the wrong direction Only a few of

the whole lot took the cue at once and turned right about, and even as they turned and their whole body faced the right track they were much relieved to behold the neat and bright road and to catch a glimpse of their home itself at some distance They felt no inclination thereafter even to look back Their old companions called them and asked them to return, but, without even turning their face towards them, they replied that they were loth to come back since they had found the right track They further told their erstwhile companions that they had already begun to have a glimpse of their home in front of them and that their love for their native place did not allow them to turn their backs upon it in spite of the latters' protestations. They, therefore, did not return and, being rid of all botheration, soon reached their happy homes

Similarly, there are four types of men in this world the depraved, the

worldly, the aspiring and the liberated Everyone is in quest of God in the shape of supreme and eternal happiness, but most of us go astray and take to the wrong path Consequently they have to undergo hardships and troubles of various kinds and do not get even a glimpse of peace and happiness Such of us, as do not care even to listen to the words of saints and other holy men who are treading the path of righteousness, and are madly running after wealth, progeny, sensual pleasures and fame all day long, are classed as low They themselves do not know what they are about and are drifting aimlessly like blind men Then there are worldly men who occasionally and incidentally listen to the spiritual talks of saints and sages, who are compassionate by nature, but they do not find much sense in what these holy men say and hence, even after listening to it, they do not like to act up to it Next come those who aspire for liberation There are two classes

of them the easy-going and the earnest Those that are easy-going seek the company of the wise, attentively listen to their discourses on spiritual subjects and even want to tread the path of righteousness with a view to realizing God They even try to alter the course of their life, that is to say, they seek to turn their mind away from worldly pleasures for some moments at least and concentrate it on God, but their constant association with worldly people casts a spell of infatuation over them and does not allow them to leave the old rut The earnest aspirants, on the other hand, take a decisive step and turn their mind wholly towards God Once we have firmly and fully applied ourselves to this task and turned our face towards Him who is the eternal abode of supreme bliss, we begin to experience a unique joy and the Lord begins to appear very close to us, nay, we begin to perceive Him everywhere within and without ourselves We can no longer devote our mind

and heart to the external appearance of the world This is what is meant by turning our face towards God Taking self-surrender only once to consist in mere outward attitude of surrender or in addressing words expressive of surrender we begin to doubt the veracity of the statements contained in the scriptures and argue within ourselves that since we have not yet been saved inspite of our having thrown ourselves at the mercy of the Lord and dedicated ourselves to Him on one occasion long ago it is just possible the verse quoted above from the *Rāmāyana* of Vālmīki may be an interpolation or at best an exaggerated statement They never pause for a moment to consider that one who has completely surrendered himself to God even once can no longer be haunted by fear of any kind nor can he have any anxiety about his salvation One who is still haunted by fear or worries about his salvation cannot be said to have surrendered himself Whereas the

fault lies with us who have our eyes fixed on the numberless objects of sense-gratification and worldly enjoyment and seek happiness therein, the fun of it is that we doubt the word of the Lord Himself and the inspired utterances of highly devout Rsis What a travesty of reason !

In order to prepare ourselves for self-surrender to God we shall have to guard ourselves against sins and wrong-doings, purge ourselves of our demoniacal disposition and regain the wisdom snatched away by *Māyā* (Illusion), through noble deeds and worship of God Through that wisdom we shall have to grasp the real nature of God, and then to dedicate our life to Him with a firm and single-minded determination This is what is meant by turning our face towards God only once And once we are face to face with Him the whole stock of our sins is destroyed and we attain that supreme state of perpetual peace, from which

there is no fall By giving up sins we do not mean that one should dedicate himself to God after he has reaped the fruit of all his sins All that we mean thereby is that one should no longer commit sins and should dedicate the rest of his life with a single-minded determination to the Lord The rest is taken care of by the Lord Himself who says —

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।
साधुरेव स मन्तव्य सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि स ॥
क्षिप्र भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छान्ति निगच्छति ।
कौन्तेय प्रति जानीहि न मे भक्त प्रणश्यति ॥

(*Gita* IX 30 31)

"Even if the most sinful worship Me with exclusive devotion, he, too, should be accounted righteous, for he hath rightly resolved "

"Soon doth he become virtuous and goeth to eternal peace, O son of Kuntī, know thou for certain that My devotee knows no fall "

Relying on these re-assuring words of the Lord and knowing Him, through

wisdom, to be our nearest and dearest one, nay, the very indweller of our heart, we must take refuge in Him We must shake off all impiety, sloth, indolence, fear, doubt, dullness, and unbelief and march on with great vigour and zeal, with a view to taking part in the cosmic game of the Divine Lord

The gates of the sacred temple of the Lord are always open to all He is accessible to all who long to meet Him He loves all who love Him Without wisdom, of course, it is not possible to comprehend His transcendental aspect, and without knowing that transcendental and ineffable aspect, which transcends even the Sattva-guna, real surrender is not possible Even dry wisdom alone would present serious difficulties in attaining to that stage There must be an under-current of love flowing along with it The true nature of God cannot be realized merely by identifying oneself with *Brahma* (the Supreme Reality) unless one has

deep love for and supreme devotion (पराभक्ति) to the Lord The Gītā says —

ब्रह्मभूतः प्रसन्नात्मा न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।
समः सर्वेषु भूतेषु मद्भक्तिं लभते पराम् ॥
भक्त्या मामभिजानाति यावान्यश्चास्मि तत्त्वतः ।
ततो मां तत्त्वतो ज्ञात्वा विशते तदनन्तरम् ॥

(XVIII 54 55)

"Identifying himself with the Eternal, serene in the Self, he neither grieveth nor desireth, the same to all beings, he obtaineth supreme devotion unto Me"

"By devotion he knoweth Me, in essence, who and what I am, having thus known Me in essence, he forthwith entereth into the Supreme Reality"

The aspirant should, therefore, fondly emember God and mature his self-surrender to the Lord with a strong will every day And, according as his desire for self-surreder grows intense, the portals of His kingdom will automatically go on opening till at last a stream of nectar will flow from the

feet of the Lord residing within his heart, and, splitting itself into the triple current of knowledge, dispassion and love, will inundate his mind and soul with divine consciousness and rid him of the fear of birth and death The whole aspect of the world will at once change for him and he will look upon everything as belonging to God Nay, he will perceive everywhere God and His Eternal *Līlā* and nothing else—

मयि सर्वमिद प्रोत सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ॥

This is what they call *Mukti* (liberation), this is the culmination of all spiritual discipline, this is the final goal Devotees who have known and realized this truth and rejoice in their Self are really very difficult to find—

वासुदेव सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभ ॥